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ABSTRACT

A working definition of the humanities and characteristics of a liberally educated person are specified. The humanities embrace areas of human knowledge that possess these elements: central concern for human beings rather than for the processes of nature or the structures of society; primary focus on the individual rather than on the group; awareness of how we know what we know; attention to moral values, whether drawn from God, man, or nature; and insistence that the process of intellectual growth calls for forthright moral judgments as an equal partner with accurate descriptive knowledge. Study of the humanities yields a liberally educated person who: remains an active independent learner; stands on a system of values that demands the application of ethical concerns to action and that accepts the presence of alternate value systems in others; understands the cultural milieu of modern society; possesses skills in analysis and synthesis, critical thinking, reading, writing, and speaking; and welcomes productive work that calls for continually developing capacities and for flexibility in changing the direction of careers over a lifetime of work. Fields of study included in the humanities, as defined by the National Endowment for the Humanities, are identified. (SW)

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What Are the Humanities?

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To clarify the relation between business and the humanities, we need a working definition. Are the humanities specific areas of study like history and philosophy rather than physics and accounting, or a system of maturely defined values, or a set of skills like writing and orderly thought? Among humanists the debate goes on endlessly--as it certainly should. But our purposes here are different. For this conference we need a statement we can use rather than a manifesto worth fighting for.

A useful place to start is the law that defines the orbit of the National Endowment for the Humanities: "The term 'humanities' includes, but is not limited to, the study of the following: language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism, and theory of the arts; those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life."

Clearly, cataloguing disciplines is not enough; biology can come under the umbrella of the humanities just as surely as some parts of philosophy or even of literature can escape it. The true tests of the humanities arise from a state of mind, an approach to truth, a manner of commitment, not from a list of disciplines. So it becomes possible to say that the humanities embrace areas of human knowledge that possess these elements:

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

1. central concern for human beings rather than for the processes of nature or the structures of society;

2. primary focus on the individual rather than on the group;

3. awareness, quite self-conscious awareness, of how we know what we know;

4. attention to moral values, whether drawn from God, man, or nature;

5. insistence that the process of intellectual growth calls for forthright moral judgments as an equal partner with accurate descriptive knowledge.

Note that two alterations--additional focus on society and on nature in the first item and additional attention to the group as well as the individual in the natural and social sciences in the second item--bring us close to the meaning of "liberal learning" or of a "liberal education."

The humanities seek to yield a product, the liberally educated person whose education never stops, a person who

- remains an active independent learner rather than a passive learner dependent on the authority of others;

- stands on a thoughtfully developed system of values that demands the application of ethical concerns to action and that, nonetheless, accepts the presence of alternate value systems in others;

- understands the cultural milieu of modern society: the past that embraces both our own and other cultural heritages; the present that includes societal needs, individual responsibilities, and the context in which they must be addressed; the future that will respond to cultural, economic, political, technological changes in society;

- possesses skills in analysis and synthesis, in critical thinking, in sorting out generalization and detail, in reading accurately, in

writing with precision and even grace, in speaking confidently within areas of com-competence;

. welcomes productive work that calls for continually developing capacities and for flexibility in changing the direction of careers over a lifetime of work that stretches well into the twenty-first century.